

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Beartooth WMA Grazing Lease –Voegele's Inc.

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

This is a six-year grazing lease renewal with an adjacent landowner, Voegele's Inc. The lease involves grazing cattle on a 160-acre portion of the Beartooth WMA, specifically the upper Cottonwood Creek area. These 160 acres are not fenced within the WMA boundary, but are fenced within Voegele's "Whitetail Prairie" pasture. The parcel was received via land trade with the BLM in 1993 for acres along Holter Lake at Log Gulch. FWP has had a successful longstanding grazing lease with Voegele's Inc. on these acres for 21 years.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The draft Environmental Assessment was available for public comment from Feb. 28 – March 20. Solicitation of public input resulted in receipt of eight comments (six positive, two neutral/negative). Comments were received as letters and emails. Responses were received from three organized groups (Gallatin Wildlife Association, Safari Club International and Pheasants Forever) with the remainder from private sportspeople. The Decision Notice will include a summary of public comments in advance of Commission consideration.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Alternative A: No Action

Residual vegetation will become decadent, becoming less attractive to elk, mule deer, and other is part of a larger nine-pasture grazing system involving 9,500 acres. The system is designed to provide for soil and native plant health.

Seven of nine years this parcel receives seasonal deferment during the growing season to support plant root development and maintenance.

Every five years this parcel receives a full year of rest from grazing.

Livestock grazing provides for better spring and summer grass green-up conditions for elk, mule deer and other wildlife species. game and nongame wildlife species.

This would require installation of three miles of fence to separate this 160-acre parcel from the rest of the larger pasture that Voegele's graze livestock on, at a cost of about \$50,000.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

This lease & continued strong relations with area landowners and continued public hunting access to lessee private lands as required by the grazing lease.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: Approve the six-year grazing lease with Voegele's Inc. FWP believes the action will continue to provide quality forage for elk, allowing the lessee to use this portion of the WMA and further avoiding the need for three miles of additional fencing.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve renewal of this six-year livestock grazing lease with Voegele's Inc. on the Beartooth WMA.